

Federal prosecutors claim two US Palestinians are linked to terrorism

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Two young Palestinian men born in Iraq and admitted to the United States as refugees were arrested on terrorism-related charges Thursday in California and Texas. Despite media headlines linking the two to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the two are not charged with taking any concrete action.

Despite the claimed ties to ISIS, neither man is accused of planning any sort of terrorist attack, either in the United States or elsewhere.

Omar Faraj Saeed al-Hardan, 24, was arrested in Houston and charged with attempting to provide “material support” to ISIS, lying on an application to become a US citizen, and making false statements. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted on all counts.

The “material support” charge is based on an extremely wide-ranging statute. By expressing his desire, in an online discussion, to go to Syria and fight with ISIS, al-Hardan was offering, in the language of the indictment, to provide “resources, including training, expert advice and assistance, and personnel—specifically himself—to a known foreign terrorist organization.”

Aws Mohammed Younis al-Jayab, 23, was arrested in Sacramento and charged with lying to immigration authorities about traveling to Syria in November 2013 to join an Islamist group—not ISIS—that was fighting against the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. He faces up to eight years in prison if convicted.

Al-Jayab is not charged with a crime for participating in the Syrian civil war. On the contrary, thousands of Arab youth have been recruited by the CIA and by US allies such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar to fight for the overthrow of the Assad government, targeted by Washington because of its close ties to Iran and Russia.

It appears, according to some press reports, that al-Jayab had actually criticized ISIS in his own online

comments and was hostile to the group. He apparently fought in Syria as a member of Ansar al-Islam, one of the numerous Islamist formations that have emerged in the course of the civil war.

In a carefully worded statement, John Carlin, assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department’s National Security Division, told the press, “Jayab allegedly traveled overseas to fight alongside terrorist organizations and lied to US authorities about his activities.”

Nearly every anti-Assad group has fought “alongside terrorist organizations,” as the US government defines them, including the so-called “moderate” groups financed, sponsored and equipped by Washington and its allies.

There is no indication that either man came to the United States as a committed radical Islamist and concealed it during the process of being accepted as a refugee—the scenario that has been the basis of fear-mongering on the part of Republican presidential candidates and congressmen of both parties.

Nor did they discuss or contemplate attacks within the United States. Speaking in Sacramento, US Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner said of al-Jayab, “there is no indication that he planned any acts of terrorism in this country.”

Al-Hardan came to the US in 2009 as a 17-year-old refugee from Iraq, under conditions where Iraqi Sunnis were the targets of persecution, repression and murder by Shiite death squads linked to the US-backed regime in Baghdad. He was granted legal permanent residence in 2011 and apparently came to the attention of US authorities when he exchanged online messages with al-Jayab asking about how to join the fighting in Syria.

Al-Jayab had come later, in 2012, directly from Syria, although he was admitted as a refugee of Iraqi origin.

He lived for a time in Arizona and Wisconsin, and in 2012-13 discussed on social media his intention to go to Syria and fight in the civil war. In November 2013 he traveled to Syria, returning to the US in January 2014 and settling in Sacramento.

He was hardly a master conspirator. On his return to the United States, he filled out a customs form declaring that he had visited only Britain and Jordan, but then told immigration officials that he had been visiting his grandmother in Turkey (he was disembarking from a direct flight from that country).

Three other people were arrested in Milwaukee, Wisconsin Thursday, relatives of al-Jayab, according to the US Attorney's office in Sacramento. These arrests are not related to "national security," officials said.

The arrests of the al-Jayab and al-Hardan immediately became fodder for the right-wing campaign against Syrian refugees and immigrants in general. Governor Greg Abbott of Texas issued a statement declaring that the arrests showed the dangers of accepting refugees from "countries substantially controlled by terrorists." How that description could apply to Iraq in 2009 or 2012, under a US puppet regime and before ISIS was even established, he did not explain.



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